The Four Individuals

An ancient teaching on the art of self-awareness.

NotebookLM

Sāriputta states: “Reverends, these four individuals are found in the world.”

Sāriputta states: “‘Reverends, these four individuals are found in the world.”

1. One with a **blemish** who doesn’t truly understand it.

2. One with a blemish who does **truly understand** it.

3. One **without a blemish** who doesn’t truly understand it.

4. One without a blemish who does **truly understand** it.

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A surprising judgment is made.

1. One with a **blemish** who doesn’t truly understand it.

Said to be worse.

2. One with a blemish who does **truly understand** it.

Said to be better.

3. One **without a blemish** who doesn’t truly understand it.

Said to be worse.

4. One without a blemish who does **truly understand** it.

Said to be better.

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‘What is the cause, Reverend Sāriputta, what is the reason for this?’

– Venerable Mahāmoggallāna

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The answer begins with a bronze cup.

‘Suppose a bronze cup was brought from a shop or smithy covered with dirt or stains…’

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The Unaware

‘The owners neither used it nor had it cleaned…’

‘Over time, it gets even dirtier and more stained.’

Outcome: Dies with a corrupted mind.

The Aware

‘The owners used it and had it cleaned…’

‘Over time, it gets cleaner and brighter.’

Outcome: Dies with an uncorrupted mind.

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The Unaware

‘The owners neither used it nor had it cleaned…’

‘Lust infects their mind, and the cup gets dirtier.’

Outcome: Dies with a corrupted mind.

The Aware

‘The owners used it and had it cleaned…’

‘Lust won’t infect their mind, and the cup stays bright.’

Outcome: Dies with an uncorrupted mind.

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But what is a ‘blemish’?

Blemish

is a term for the spheres of bad, unskillful wishes.

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These wishes arise from anger and bitterness when our desires are unmet.

“I hope the mendicants don’t find out about my offense...”

“I hope the Teacher will question me alone...”

“I hope I get the best seat, the best drink, the best almsfood...”

“I hope they will honor, respect, and venerate me alone...”

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“Outward appearance can be deceiving. The true measure is what lies within.” (Canela Deck)

A person with un-given-up blemishes is like a beautiful cup paraded through the market. People see it and say:

> ‘My good man, what is it that you’re carrying like a precious treasure?”

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The Unexamined Life

...they'd open up the lid... and inside is the carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human.

"As soon as they saw it they were filled with loathing, revulsion, and disgust. Not even those who were hungry wanted to eat it."

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The Examined Life

“But a person who has given up these blemishes is like a cup prepared with boiled fine rice... served with many soups and sauces.”

“As soon as they saw it they were filled with liking, attraction, and relish. Even those who had eaten wanted to eat it.”

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A teaching that planes away our faults.

"I hope Samīti the wainwright planes out the crooks, bends, and flaws in this rim... Venerable Sāriputta planes our faults with this teaching as if he knows my heart with his heart!"

– Venerable Mahāmoggallāna

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A teaching that adorns our virtues.

"For those who are **faithful** and **not deceitful**, hearing this teaching is like a young person, **fond of adornments**, being presented with a **garland of lotuses** or jasmine."

"...they would take them in both hands and **place them on the crown of the head**."

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And so these two spiritual giants agreed with each others' fine words.

Inter
The path is the same for the blemished and the unblemished:
to draw away from the unskillful and establish ourselves in the skillful.
It begins with seeing clearly what is within.

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